

Annual General Vestry
1 October 2020
Rector's Remarks

I want to begin with just a verse from Scripture, which I'll come back to at the end: the psalmist writes and says in Ps 127: 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain.'

Looking back over the previous year it's been encouraging to see all that has gone on.

Following our last Easter Vestry, we welcomed Anna Williams, a second year CITI student on placement with us over the Holy Week and Easter period, during which we held our usual Holy Week Services and also a Children's Outreach Event.

In addition to all of our ongoing normal and seasonal services and ministries, such as Life Groups, Silver Threads, 60+, BB, GB, Band of Brothers, Flourish, Ladies' Fellowship, Youth and Children's ministries including our Friday night Junior and Senior Youth Clubs, the Homeless Ministry and so on, we managed to:

- Complete the Sunday night Alpha Course
- Hold a Prayer Walk in Ballybeen
- Host Summer Madness for our young people
- Run a Holiday Bible club with for about 40 children
- Restart Beanies, and a big thanks to Karen Magee and her team for helping make that possible
- Begin CaveTime, running on Saturday mornings for about 15 men – the kicker is that it started at 6.30am, and still they came!
- Hold a Flourish breakfast for the ladies in November
- Launch Little Church, and I want to particularly thank Rebecca Adair for starting up that ministry, that I hope one day soon we'll be able to see active again
- Gift giveaways through Flourish at Christmas and Easter, and then a further gift giveaway to Key Workers during lockdown with the help of some of our Life Group members and GB Leaders
- Reformat our evening services
- Continued with our prayer meetings including our Boiler Room prayer before our morning services

During this time period, there were other key events and working groups that were operating in the background. At the end of January we received an old friend as our new Bishop. As to working groups, through our SV, we carried out a Strategic Review of our staffing needs, and our Building Development Team met regularly to help bring our building project to fruition.

Overshadowing this past year, of course has been the Coronavirus and the COVID-19 pandemic. No one ever thought that when we held our first online service for Mother's Day on the 22nd of March that we would effectively be out of our church buildings and unable to conduct In-Church Worship for a whole 6 months.

As challenging as this time has been for us all, we have also managed to turn what was a very difficult thing and a national crisis into an opportunity, with our shift to Online Worship Services that suddenly enabled us to reach not only our own parish, but to many far beyond as well. It has been pleasing to see the number of views we continue to get with our online services, which continue to exceed my expectations. In addition, I continue to get messages of thanks from people near and far who have been blessed by our online worship services. Indeed, this Sunday at our Family Harvest Service we are already seeing new families trying out our church for the first time, because of what they saw online during this period.

Also in this period we actively engaged with our community in the Community Relief Effort, and with my Rector's and my Ballybeen Improvement Group Director's hats on, I helped with the BT16 Covid-19 Relief Group to coordinate efforts to help those in our community who needed it most. We played our part by opening our hall to become a relief centre during the crisis, and until only very recently we stored and then delivered food to members of the community who found themselves in difficulty during the pandemic.

This was one of the biggest highlights for me over the lockdown period, as we saw the whole community come together to help in this time of need. It was a joy to work together so closely with other local churches, community groups, business people and local councillors in order to organise an army of volunteers who put themselves forward to help those who needed it most. At the height of our efforts in lockdown, we probably had about 160 government food parcels coming in and out of our halls, each week, delivered by volunteers throughout our community and all the way out to Moneyreagh. In all, we managed to deliver 10,000 leaflets across Dundonald, 1450 food boxes, 304 prescriptions to those shielding as well as befriending phone calls to those in need of a friendly phone call.

More recently, it has taken the hard efforts of our Health and Safety Team headed up by Chris Adair to get us back into the church. Given the number of protocols and guidelines that we had to satisfy to return to In-Church Worship, it was a mammoth task, and I just want to thank that team particularly for their hard work and dedication which has enabled us to begin meeting together here again. Indeed, on Sunday we will have held 6 services, including 2 Harvest Services, 2 funerals, as well as a number of meetings and an in person youth event in the hall this week (and I believe there may be one more to come as well). All in all, great effort, and great work.

But before I close there are a few others I want to highlight, for their faithfulness week by week in helping to keep our ministries and Sunday worship going throughout these past 6 months and particularly through the lockdown period as well. I will not try to name everyone, because I worry that I may forget some folks. But I want to thank particularly Linda Gordon and her team of youth leaders for their Zoom chats and then face to face meetings with our young people when the opportunity finally arose, and finally now in person meetings as well. I want to thank Ellen Boyd and her team of children's leaders for their stellar online performances and for faithfully delivering online content for our children and families through this time.

I want to thank Susannah Harris for her faithfulness in leading us in worship through the most restricted portion of the lockdown and now coordinating our bands for Sunday Worship, both online and live as well. I want to thank Darren Cumberland, our cameraman who has done our recordings for our online services and who has given of himself to help us mix sound for our worship. And I want to thank Karen Magee, who has liaised with Darren and myself through this period and who has helped me to keep our content online and coordinate our AV needs at rehearsals, recordings and so on.

I want to thank Kyle Harris, for faithfully keeping our CaveTime men's ministry going through lockdown over Zoom, and then through the summer months as well.

I also want to thank our Life Group Leaders as well as our our Pastoral Care Team, who continue to be a great blessing to me and to all of us as they help with pastoral care in the parish, but even more particularly over these last 6 months. Throughout this period, and most importantly when in-person visits were not possible, our pastoral care team took to the phones, and began ringing around the parish, checking in to make sure everyone was ok. And can I just say a particularly big thank you to Sylvia Clarke, who during this time period continued to work faithfully – not in the office – but from home, phoning a vast number of people and using her working hours and her gifts to help us to continue our pastoral care, particularly with our special care lists and the older generation of folks connect with us through our various ministries.

I want to also particularly thank David Manning and Noel Gordon for their ongoing support and encouragement since our last AGV. They have each given of themselves for me and for you in Christ's service, in ways that have enabled us to be where we are today. I want to especially thank David for heading up the Building Development Team. Without his driving that team forward and facilitating these efforts, we would not be where we are today, on the brink of starting the building works we've been dreaming of for many years. Thank you.

I also want to thank Donna Neill, who moved on from our full time staff last year. Although we thanked her at her leaving service in church, I want to officially note here, in our minutes, our thanks to her for her ministry among us with the youth and children, and we continue to wish her every blessing for her ongoing ministry wherever the Lord takes her – and we're delighted that she continues to worship with us!

It's also a delight to have the newly ordained Rev Anna Williams back with us now for her Deacon-Intern year. We've already been blessed by her gifts and the added capacity she brings, and we look forward to what God has in store for us through her ministry this year.

Throughout my ministry here, it has been my mantra that it's 'Teamwork that makes the dreamwork!' And nowhere has this been more clearly evidenced than in our life together this year. I am simply overwhelmed by the number of folks that have been involved in serving in all of these areas and ministries since our last AGV. I want to thank all who have given of themselves for the Lord's service, in our midst over this past year, and reiterate that this is the only way it can be. No one person can do any of these things, but working together in the Lord's strength, we can accomplish great things. But let's just remember – Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain. And so as we enter this building phase, we continue to look to the Lord, and seek to follow his leading as we work to see his coming kingdom.

–Rev. Jim Cheshire